

Social Security Administration

§416.920

(3) Procedures for control of scheduling consultative examinations;

(4) Procedures to ensure that close attention is given to specific evaluation issues involved in each case;

(5) Procedures to ensure that only required examinations and tests are authorized in accordance with the standards set forth in this subpart;

(6) Procedures for providing medical or supervisory approval for the authorization or purchase of consultative examinations and for additional tests or studies requested by consulting medical sources. This includes physician approval for the ordering of any diagnostic test or procedure where the question of significant risk to the claimant/beneficiary might be raised. See §416.919m.

(7) procedures for the ongoing review of consultative examination results to ensure compliance with written guidelines;

(8) Procedures to encourage active participation by physicians and psychologists in the consultative examination oversight program;

(9) Procedures for handling complaints;

(10) Procedures for evaluating claimant reactions to key providers; and

(11) A program of systematic, onsite reviews of key providers that will include annual onsite reviews of such providers when claimants are present for examinations. This provision does not contemplate that such reviews will involve participation in the actual examinations but, rather, offer an opportunity to talk with claimants at the provider's site before and after the examination and to review the provider's overall operation.

(g) The State agencies will cooperate with us when we conduct monitoring activities in connection with their oversight management of their consultative examination programs.

[56 FR 36967, Aug. 1, 1991, as amended at 65 FR 11880, Mar. 7, 2000; 71 FR 16459, Mar. 31, 2006; 75 FR 32846, June 10, 2010; 76 FR 24810, May 3, 2011]

PROCEDURES TO MONITOR THE CONSULTATIVE EXAMINATION

§416.919t Consultative examination oversight.

(a) We will ensure that referrals for consultative examinations and purchases of consultative examinations are made in accordance with our policies. We will also monitor both the referral processes and the product of the consultative examinations obtained. This monitoring may include reviews by independent medical specialists under direct contract with SSA.

(b) Through our regional offices, we will undertake periodic comprehensive reviews of each State agency to evaluate each State's management of the consultative examination process. The review will involve visits to key providers, with State staff participating, including a program physician when the visit will deal with medical techniques or judgment, or factors that go to the core of medical professionalism.

(c) We will also perform ongoing special management studies of the quality of consultative examinations purchased from key providers and other sources and the appropriateness of the examinations authorized.

[56 FR 36968, Aug. 1, 1991]

EVALUATION OF DISABILITY

§416.920 Evaluation of disability of adults, in general.

(a) *General—(1) Purpose of this section.* This section explains the five-step sequential evaluation process we use to decide whether you are disabled, as defined in §416.905.

(2) *Applicability of these rules.* These rules apply to you if you are age 18 or older and you file an application for Supplemental Security Income disability benefits.

(3) *Evidence considered.* We will consider all evidence in your case record when we make a determination or decision whether you are disabled. See §416.920b.

(4) *The five-step sequential evaluation process.* The sequential evaluation process is a series of five “steps” that we follow in a set order. See paragraph (h) of this section for an exception to this

rule. If we can find that you are disabled or not disabled at a step, we make our determination or decision and we do not go on to the next step. If we cannot find that you are disabled or not disabled at a step, we go on to the next step. Before we go from step three to step four, we assess your residual functional capacity. (See paragraph (e) of this section.) We use this residual functional capacity assessment at both step four and at step five when we evaluate your claim at these steps. These are the five steps we follow:

(i) At the first step, we consider your work activity, if any. If you are doing substantial gainful activity, we will find that you are not disabled. (See paragraph (b) of this section.)

(ii) At the second step, we consider the medical severity of your impairment(s). If you do not have a severe medically determinable physical or mental impairment that meets the duration requirement in § 416.909, or a combination of impairments that is severe and meets the duration requirement, we will find that you are not disabled. (See paragraph (c) of this section.)

(iii) At the third step, we also consider the medical severity of your impairment(s). If you have an impairment(s) that meets or equals one of our listings in appendix 1 to subpart P of part 404 of this chapter and meets the duration requirement, we will find that you are disabled. (See paragraph (d) of this section.)

(iv) At the fourth step, we consider our assessment of your residual functional capacity and your past relevant work. If you can still do your past relevant work, we will find that you are not disabled. See paragraphs (f) and (h) of this section and § 416.960(b).

(v) At the fifth and last step, we consider our assessment of your residual functional capacity and your age, education, and work experience to see if you can make an adjustment to other work. If you can make an adjustment to other work, we will find that you are not disabled. If you cannot make an adjustment to other work, we will find that you are disabled. See paragraphs (g) and (h) of this section and § 416.960(c).

(5) *When you are already receiving disability benefits.* If you are already receiving disability benefits, we will use a different sequential evaluation process to decide whether you continue to be disabled. We explain this process in § 416.994(b)(5).

(b) *If you are working.* If you are working and the work you are doing is substantial gainful activity, we will find that you are not disabled regardless of your medical condition or your age, education, and work experience.

(c) *You must have a severe impairment.* If you do not have any impairment or combination of impairments which significantly limits your physical or mental ability to do basic work activities, we will find that you do not have a severe impairment and are, therefore, not disabled. We will not consider your age, education, and work experience.

(d) *When your impairment(s) meets or equals a listed impairment in appendix 1.* If you have an impairment(s) which meets the duration requirement and is listed in appendix 1 or is equal to a listed impairment(s), we will find you disabled without considering your age, education, and work experience.

(e) *When your impairment(s) does not meet or equal a listed impairment.* If your impairment(s) does not meet or equal a listed impairment, we will assess and make a finding about your residual functional capacity based on all the relevant medical and other evidence in your case record, as explained in § 416.945. (See paragraph (g)(2) of this section and § 416.962 for an exception to this rule.) We use our residual functional capacity assessment at the fourth step of the sequential evaluation process to determine if you can do your past relevant work (paragraph (f) of this section) and at the fifth step of the sequential evaluation process (if the evaluation proceeds to this step) to determine if you can adjust to other work (paragraph (g) of this section).

(f) *Your impairment(s) must prevent you from doing your past relevant work.* If we cannot make a determination or decision at the first three steps of the sequential evaluation process, we will compare our residual functional capacity assessment, which we made under paragraph (e) of this section, with the physical and mental demands of your

past relevant work. See paragraph (h) of this section and §416.960(b). If you can still do this kind of work, we will find that you are not disabled.

(g) *Your impairment(s) must prevent you from making an adjustment to any other work.* (1) If we find that you cannot do your past relevant work because you have a severe impairment(s) (or you do not have any past relevant work), we will consider the same residual functional capacity assessment we made under paragraph (e) of this section, together with your vocational factors (your age, education, and work experience) to determine if you can make an adjustment to other work. (See §416.960(c).) If you can make an adjustment to other work, we will find you not disabled. If you cannot, we will find you disabled.

(2) We use different rules if you meet one of the two special medical-vocational profiles described in §416.962. If you meet one of those profiles, we will find that you cannot make an adjustment to other work, and that you are disabled.

(h) *Expedited process.* If we do not find you disabled at the third step, and we do not have sufficient evidence about your past relevant work to make a finding at the fourth step, we may proceed to the fifth step of the sequential evaluation process. If we find that you can adjust to other work based solely on your age, education, and the same residual functional capacity assessment we made under paragraph (e) of this section, we will find that you are not disabled and will not make a finding about whether you can do your past relevant work at the fourth step. If we find that you may be unable to adjust to other work or if §416.962 may apply, we will assess your claim at the fourth step and make a finding about whether you can perform your past relevant work. See paragraph (g) of this section and §416.960(c).

[50 FR 8728, Mar. 5, 1985; 50 FR 19164, May 7, 1985, as amended at 56 FR 5554, Feb. 11, 1991; 56 FR 36968, Aug. 1, 1991; 65 FR 80308, Dec. 21, 2000; 68 FR 51164, Aug. 26, 2003; 77 FR 10656, Feb. 23, 2012; 77 FR 43495, July 25, 2012]

§416.920a Evaluation of mental impairments.

(a) *General.* The steps outlined in §§416.920 and 416.924 apply to the evaluation of physical and mental impairments. In addition, when we evaluate the severity of mental impairments for adults (persons age 18 and over) and in persons under age 18 when Part A of the Listing of Impairments is used, we must follow a special technique at each level in the administrative review process. We describe this special technique in paragraphs (b) through (e) of this section. Using this technique helps us:

(1) Identify the need for additional evidence to determine impairment severity;

(2) Consider and evaluate functional consequences of the mental disorder(s) relevant to your ability to work; and

(3) Organize and present our findings in a clear, concise, and consistent manner.

(b) *Use of the technique.* (1) Under the special technique, we must first evaluate your pertinent symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings to determine whether you have a medically determinable mental impairment(s). See §416.908 for more information about what is needed to show a medically determinable impairment. If we determine that you have a medically determinable mental impairment(s), we must specify the symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings that substantiate the presence of the impairment(s) and document our findings in accordance with paragraph (e) of this section.

(2) We must then rate the degree of functional limitation resulting from the impairment(s) in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section and record our findings as set out in paragraph (e) of this section.

(c) *Rating the degree of functional limitation.* (1) Assessment of functional limitations is a complex and highly individualized process that requires us to consider multiple issues and all relevant evidence to obtain a longitudinal picture of your overall degree of functional limitation. We will consider all relevant and available clinical signs and laboratory findings, the effects of